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The Manor House of Lacolle

A Description and Historical Sketch of the Manoir of the Seigniory of de Beaujeu or Lacolle

BY

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PRESIDENT

of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society

of Montreal.

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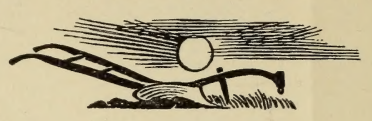

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THE MANOR HOUSE OF LACOLLE.

By W. D. Lighthall, K. C.

THE Manor House of the Seigniory of Lacolle or De Beaujeu is situated in a retired neighborhood, on the New York State border-line about four miles south-west of Lacolle Village, and one mile north of the village of Champlain, N. Y. and about forty miles from Montreal. The highway from Lacolle to Champlain runs through the property. The traveller from the north finds himself entering well-wooded lands and at length passes the heavy low stone-walls and large white gate of the grounds and sees the house nearby on a slight elevation to the right. A sloping lawn and old trees extend in front, the gardens are at the north-side, and a hundred yards further, a wooded park of about a hundred acres. On the opposite, or west, side of the road, the tall old elm grove forms part of a hillside farm. The Manorhouse itself is large, constructed of wood, and having an extensive stone gabled wing, the whole ornamented with vines. In front, six tall, slender, fluted pillars with Ionic capitals give Colonial character to the verandah and meet the roof above the second story. The massive oak front door is di-

vided into an upper and lower half, with large brass knocker. The interior is mostly finished in polished hard woods, with broad fire-places and colonial mantels in most of the rooms. The main part of the house was built in 1825 by Mrs. Henry Hoyle, formerly Mrs. Major Henry Ten Eyck Schuyler, of Troy, N. Y., under the following circumstances:

As Sarah Visscher she had inherited a large fortune from her grand-uncle Lieutenant-General Garret Fisher (Visscher), a Loyalist officer of Sir Adolphus Oughton's regiment, the 55th, which was present at the taking of Montreal, and who died at Manchester Square, London, in 1808, after a distinguished career. This fortune arrived at the beginning of the war of 1812, just before the death of her first husband Major Schuyler, nephew of General Philip Schuyler, and descendant of the well-known colonial military family of that name. He left three daughters and a son. They possessed other very valuable property in Troy, including a handsome farm and mansion at the South end, shown in old pictures of the city, on which about a fourth of Troy was afterwards built. In 1816, Henry Hoyle, who was a Lancashire man, married her for her fortune, which he soon found belonged to the children by strict law. He therefore, mak-

ing great pretensions of fatherly kindness and religion, set himself to defeat their title. By falsifying the facts, he managed to obtain a snap judgment against their guardian in favor of himself, but feeling his tenure insecure, sold the mansion and farm in Troy, and persuaded his wife to move to the property in Lacolle, just on the frontier line. It was only after his death in 1849, that the widow and orphans discovered his fraud, and that he had obtained the placing of the entire property in his own name in order to possess it. There followed a furious family quarrel between the Schuyler and Hoyle heirs, in which the old lady took the side of the former, and in fact sued her Hoyle sons to right the injury. At her death in 1851, she refused to be buried beside Hoyle and stipulated in her will that she be taken back to Troy and interred with her first husband, and that the burial lot be surrounded with stone posts, each carrying the name "*Schuyler*". Henry Hoyle had previously possessed from 1816, the actual land on which the Manorhouse is built. After their arrival in 1825, he employed the fortune of which he had thus obtained control, and regarding which he represented himself to his wife as only acting for her, in adding to this land and in many investments along a wide range of the border coun-

ties. Her suit estimates the properties at £38,000. The home property was made a prize stock farm—one of the first if not the actual first of the kind in Canada. Cattle-breeding on shares was made by him a large enterprise among the settlers, and every year his share of increase was collected and driven to Montreal for sale. The farm-book is a parchment-covered ledger previously used by Sarah Visscher's uncle, Leonard Van Buren in 1782 (who was also uncle of President Martin Van Buren). Water-powers at various points were bought and developed with her money, and mills erected, including those at Lacolle, Huntingdon and Athelstan; and several thousands of acres were acquired at Huntingdon, Lacolle, Irish Ridge, and other localities. He was almost at once appointed a magistrate, his brother Colonel Robert Hoyle of Lacolle, was the member of Parliament, later on her son-in-law Merrit Hotchkiss was member and another son-in-law was Registrar of Huntingdon. At that period several of the wealthy men of Montreal were acquiring large tracts, apparently to form estates like the seigniories. With some of these, Mr. Hoyle made common cause. One was a prosperous merchant, Thomas Woolrych, who had very large holdings in what is now Huntingdon county,

and their intimacy was so close that Woolrych presented him with his own oil portrait, in late eighteenth century costume, which is now in the Château de Ramezay. Woolrych was closely related to the Christies and to their relatives, the Tunstall family, who ultimately followed them as *Seigneurs propriétaires* of Lacolle. The Seigniory, granted in 1727 to Sieur Louis Denis de la Ronde, and anew in 1743 to Daniel Lienard de Beaujeu, had been bought, totally undeveloped, along with seven others, shortly after the Conquest by General Gabriel Christie, an officer of Wolfe, who became Commander-in-Chief in Canada, and died in 1799. His handsome stone Manorhouse and mill are to be seen at Chambly. He was a connection of the Schuylers by marriage. On his death his properties fell to his son General Napier Burton Christie, who had married the daughter of General Burton, to whom the dying Wolfe sent his last order—to cut off the French retreat at Beauport. Napier Burton Christie having died without issue, the eight seigniories de Bleury, Repentigny, de Lery, de Beaujeu, Chambly, Noyan, Sabrevois and Chazy passed to William Plenderleath, a natural son of Gabriel, under his will, which is discussed in the case of *King* vs *Tunstall.*

Finally, by William Plenderleath Christie's will of 1842 and death in 1845, the Seigniory of

Lacolle passed to the two sons and the grandson Gabriel, of the Reverend James Tunstall, of Montreal. Portraits of General Christie, his wife, his son Napier, two of his brothers, and two of his children, are in the Château. The good old Tunstall family, representatives of the Christies, remained the *Seigneurs propriétaires* of Lacolle until its sale in 1902 to the Credit Foncier. Mrs. Hoyle, represented by her husband, early entered into dealings about the Seigniory affairs, they being residents within its limits. One of their Terrier books begins in 1843. After the Tunstalls became *Seigneurs-propriétaires,* they found it convenient to continue the arrangement, since they lived in Montreal. The arrangement consisted in one of the singular transactions of which the old feudal laws present examples. There were various kinds of *Seigneurs.* In this case the *Seigneurs-propriétaires,* for a large cash sum advanced to them, gave up to Mr. Hoyle (who as we saw really acted for his wife) the entire possession of the seigniorial rights, with even the honors, *avec les droits honorifiques,* as *Seigneur usufruitier.* A few years afterwards one sixth of the ownership was also added, making the Hoyles *co-Seineurs propriétaires.* (Since the moneys more strictly belonged to the Schuyler heirs, it may be

said that equitably they were the real Seigneurs). Thus the matter continued for generations, the old house being the annual scene of the quaint visits of the censitaires, until the recent sale to the Credit Foncier. In the latter sale, the then co-seigneur, Henry Hoyle III, reserved his own lands *en seigneurie,* with the title of "Seigneur of Lacolle" and the permanent designation of the house as "The Manor House of Lacolle", but of course these were merely points of sentiment. The demesne estate at one time comprised about 2500 arpents. Up to recently they still comprised about 1300, but are now only about 600 or 700. The Manor, "Rockcliff Wood", was a treasure house of old furniture, silver, china, and relics of the past, now distributed among the family, and which had come down from many historical forbears. The oldest article was a pewter "great flagon" some fourteen inches high, bearing the date stamp of Henry VIII and having on its cover a large embossed *fleur-de-lys* such as pewterers were ordered by Henry VIII in 1543 to put upon the covers of all great flagons. This is one of the rarest existing pieces of English pewter, and has no known duplicate. In the Manoir of Lacolle it worthily represented the sixteenth century. The seventeenth was represented by a set of "Late Spanish" Dutch chairs, one of which is

now owned by a descendant of the Schuylers in Montreal. The set had been inherited by old Mrs. Ten Eyck Schuyler from her great-grandmother, a Visscher. Of the eighteenth century was the quaint hooded mahogany family cradle; a clawfoot Chippendale desk of red mahogany; a Sheraton card-table, an octagonal table, one or two shield-back chairs,—all of carved mahogany and of different sets; a handsome spindle-legged bow-front Heppelwhite sideboard, several old portraits, and much silver coming from General Fisher and other relatives, and other objects, including at one time various uniforms, a pair of pistols and a field-chest of General Schuyler, the gold watch and despatches of General Fisher, and other such articles. (In fact the pieces mentioned were but a small remnant of those which had been brought to the house in 1825). Of Empire period were many fine furniture pieces, several silkwork pictures, fiddle and grand-father clocks, etc., while naturally the early Victorian, and all modern changes, were duly represented. In the cabinets were rare collections of various sorts largely brought together by the late Mrs. Mary Averill Hoyle, the last co-Seigneuresse, who died early in 1914, and whose gracious hospitality and accomplishments seemed part of the place. Naturally the old Manoir was a delightful spot to visit, either in summer or winter.